Through the Looking Glass

A CAGW Special Report

Workplace Safety in the Federal Government: Record of Failure, Legacy of Waste

By John E. Frydenlund
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CITIZENS AGAINST GOVERNMENT WASTE

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CITIZENS AGAINST GOVERNMENT WASTE

Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW) is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to educating the American public about waste, mismanagement, and inefficiency in the federal government.

CAGW was founded in 1984 by J. Peter Grace and nationally-syndicated columnist Jack Anderson to build public support for implementation of the Grace Commission recommendations and other waste-cutting proposals. Since its inception, CAGW has been at the forefront of the fight for efficiency, economy, and accountability in government.

CAGW has more than one million members and supporters nationwide. Since 1986, CAGW and its members have helped save taxpayers about $687 billion.

CAGW publishes a quarterly newsletter, *Government WasteWatch,* and produces special reports, monographs, and television documentaries examining government waste and what citizens can do to stop it.

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Introduction

When people hear the term "workplace safety," the first thing that likely comes to mind is the serious safety problems that existed in slaughterhouses across the country during the industrial revolution. These safety problems were uncovered in the revolutionary book, The Jungle by Upton Sinclair. The uproar that The Jungle created led to federal government regulations that made conditions safer for workers and products healthier for consumers.

While conditions have improved since Sinclair's era, Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW) has found that many federal workers suffer from less safe and healthy conditions than their private industry counterparts, and the problem has received relatively little attention.

In fact, the federal government's inability to keep pace with private industry's progress in improving workplace safety is exacting a serious human toll in terms of worker illness, injury and death. It is not only adversely impacting the "quality of life" of workers, but of their families as well.

There are also taxpayer costs involved in the federal failures. Making federal agencies safer places to work will not only help save lives and prevent injuries and illness, it will save taxpayers billions of dollars — rather than cost money, as many might assume.

By examining workplace safety success stories, some from the federal and municipal governments, but mostly from private industry, it may be possible to determine why there is a gap between these successes and the federal government's failures. In order to start the process toward getting the federal government on the right track, root causes for this failure are identified.

Federal agencies can — and should — do a better job of protecting government workers. But, in order to do so, they first must decide to make workplace safety a priority. While there have been some such efforts in the past, policy makers should be made aware of how the federal government's deficiencies have had not only devastating consequences for individuals, but also for many federal agencies' budgets. Such newfound awareness will hopefully spawn a greater commitment to achieving workplace safety for federal workers.

The federal government can improve by paying attention to success stories and tapping private industry expertise. By doing so, lives and money could be saved, crippling injuries could be prevented and productivity improved.

While not an update of The Jungle, this report is intended to shed light on the problem of workplace safety in the federal government and encourage improvements. It is not a blueprint of how each federal agency can improve their safety record. Rather, it is hoped that officials will commit to tackle the problem and to draw on the best resources available to improve workplace safety.

Achieving greater workplace safety for federal workers is the right thing to do. Policy makers stand to gain resources by improving safety — resources that can be put to much better use. The most conservative estimate for the taxpayer cost of the dismal federal workplace safety record, which includes only medical and compensation costs, is $2 billion.

The Federal Government's Workplace Safety Record

In today's highly competitive economy, workplace safety is an issue of growing importance in the private sector. Other than the obvious costs of increased medical expenses and lost wage compensation, workplace injuries cause personal pain and suffering to workers and their families, disrupt productivity, and eat at the fabric of company morale. Corporate America's focus on workplace safety has produced dramatic results: since 1973, while U.S. employment has nearly doubled from 56 million to 105 million workers, workplace fatalities have been cut by more than 40 percent and the incidence rate for occupational injuries and illnesses has dropped by 45 percent.[1]

Federal Agencies More Dangerous Than Some Private Industries

Unfortunately, the federal government has not achieved a similar workplace safety record. The fact is that the federal government can be a dangerous place to work. But few people are aware that federal injury and illness rates are higher than in some "high risk" private industries.

In partnership with the Office of Federal Agency Programs (OFAP) — a branch of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) — each federal department or agency head is responsible for providing federal employees with a safe workplace. The OFAP acts as a "mini-OSHA" for the nation's current 3.1 million federal employees. The federal government processed more than 150,000 on-the-job injury, illness and fatality claims in 1998.[2] That translated to a workplace-caused injury or illness case occurring every 3 minutes and 40 seconds. Between 1999 and 2000, the federal

[1] Fatal Occupational Injuries and Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, U.S. Department of Labor, OSHA, and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1973-2000.
[2] Ibid., 1998.

government witnessed a 3 percent increase (an additional 4,730) in injury and illness cases.[3]

In fact, during 1999, an employee was more likely to be injured or become ill while working for a federal agency than someone working for a number of high risk, private sector industries, including pulp mills and petroleum refining.[4] During 2000, a federal government employee was more likely to be injured or become ill on the job than was someone working in the wild outdoors, including the fishing, hunting, and trapping industry.[5]

In 1999, there was also a greater likelihood that an employee would die from an occupational injury or illness while working for a federal agency than while working in such "high risk" industries as manufacturing, poultry slaughtering and processing, or in industrial machinery and equipment production.[6]

Being a federal worker can also be more deadly than other so-called "dangerous" occupations. For instance, in 1998, while the number of metal miners was six times higher than the number of U.S. Bureau of Reclamation workers, who manage, develop, and protect the nation's water resources, the Bureau of Reclamation reported almost the same number of occupational fatalities. In the same year, the U.S. Department of Interior employed one half the total number of workers as the meat packing industry, yet the Department reported three times as many work-related deaths.[7]

In 1999, the number of meat packers was five times higher than the number of U.S. Department of State workers, yet the Department reported the same number of occupational fatalities. In the same year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) employed half as many workers as the poultry slaughtering and processing industry, yet USDA reported more work-related deaths.[8]

It is also illustrative to compare some of the federal agencies with the highest occupational injury or illness rates per 100 full-time workers with different sectors of private industry. In 1998, for example, the rate for the Architect of the Capitol, a relatively small entity, was more than twice the construction industry rate. That was also the case with the Bureau of Engraving and Printing's rate compared to the commercial printing industry, and the Food Safety Inspection Service's rate as compared to the meat and fish markets. The National Park Service rate was higher than the amusement and recreation services rate. The U.S. Coast Guard's rate was higher than the water transportation services industry, and the U.S. Mint's rate was higher than the printing ink industry. The Government Printing Office rate was an astounding nine times higher than the commercial printing trade services industry (see Chart I).[9]

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[3] Ibid., 1999 and 2000.
[4] Ibid., 1999.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 1998.
[8] Ibid., 1999.
[9] Ibid., 1998.

The safety story for 1999 was basically the same. The Bureau of Engraving and Printing occupational injury and illness rates remained at more than twice the rate of the commercial printing industry. That was also the case for the Food Safety Inspection Service as compared to the meat and fish markets. The National Park Service rate remained higher than the amusement and recreation services. The same held true for the U.S Coast Guard rate as compared to the water transportation industry and the U.S. Mint rate when compared with the printing ink industry. The Government Printing Office rate dropped, but was still four times higher as compared to the printing trade service (see Chart II).[10]

The comparisons made between federal government agencies and different sectors of the private industry for 1999 outlined above held true for 2000 with one exception. The occupational injury and illness rate for the U.S. Mint increased, and became twice that of the printing ink industry rate (see Chart III).

The Cost to the Taxpayer

Out of the approximately $2 billion the federal government spends under the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA) compensating victims and their families for workplace illnesses, injuries, and deaths annually,[11] medical costs total approximately $550 million and fatality costs total approximately $110 million. Compensation costs, similar to workmen's compensation provided to private sector employees, account for 70 percent of total FECA costs or $1.4 billion.[12]

The U.S. Postal Service accounts for 33 percent of total FECA costs, although postal employees represent about 28 percent of federal government workers covered by FECA. The Department of Defense, including the Departments of the Navy, Army and Air Force, representing 42 percent of federal government workers, accounts for another 30 percent of total FECA costs. Illnesses, injuries and fatalities related to combat duty are not included in these figures. In fiscal year 2000, the Army's FECA cost was $167 million. The Departments of Agriculture, Interior, Justice, Transportation, Treasury and Veterans Affairs, plus the Tennessee Valley Authority, account for 28 percent of FECA costs, while representing 26 percent of the federal workforce (see Chart IV).[13]

Social and Economic Consequences

Many of the individuals compensated under FECA become unable to work, or their ability to work is limited by physical impairment. FECA costs are just the tip of the iceberg, reflecting only a small portion of the social and economic consequences of federal workplace injuries and illnesses.

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[10] Ibid., 1999.
[11] Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), U.S. Department of Labor, "Federal Worker 2000: A Presidential Initiative," www.dol.gov.
[12] U.S. Department of Labor and Office of Worker's Compensation Programs, 2000, www.dol.gov.
[13] Ibid.

In addition to the direct costs of lost earnings and health care costs related to injuries and illnesses, there are numerous indirect economic costs. The added expense of workplace accidents include lost productivity, diminished worker morale, new training and recruitment for staff replacements, and other direct costs. Taken together, these additional costs can multiply additional government costs by two to five times (some claim as high as ten times) — costs ultimately borne by the federal taxpayer.[14] For instance, while the U.S. Postal Service's total FECA costs are approximately $666 million annually, according to Pete McCarroll, USPS vehicle safety program analyst and director of their safety campaign, "total Postal Service compensation expenses for service-wide accidents, injuries, tort claims, rehabilitation and such will be approximately $1.8 billion for 2001."[15]

Other indirect costs, such as reduced income, depletion of savings, loss of homes, increased expenditures for professional counseling and purchased caregiver services in the home, home modifications and equipment related to disability, and deferral or loss of education for family members, are borne by the injured workers and their families.

There are also substantial non-economic consequences of workplace injuries and illnesses on quality of life. Physical and psychological functioning in everyday activities may be affected, self-esteem and self-confidence may be reduced, and an individual's role in the family and community may change. The bottom line is that income and employment losses, illness, and physical impairment can have profound human consequences on both federal workers and their families. It is also certain that other costs fall on the community in the form of increased use of social services and for other programs, such as law enforcement.

Federal Safety Statistics: Moving in the Wrong Direction

Most safety experts believe that workplace injuries and fatalities could be reduced by at least 90 percent.[16] Private industry may at least be on the right track. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2000, workplace injury and illness rates declined to the lowest level since the agency began reporting the data in the early 1970's.[17] On the other hand, the total injury and illness rate for federal government workers, excluding USPS, increased from 3.91 per 100 workers in 1999 to 3.95 in 2000.[18]

Well-managed private firms, including some of the largest companies in the country, are demonstrating that workplace safety can be improved. They have dramatically reduced

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[14] "Harnessing the Power of Safety for Bottom Line Benefits," Charles O. Holliday, Energy Houston, Volume 2, Number 2, 2000, ("Holliday").
[15] USPS Press Release, October 15, 2001.
[16] "Building a Safety Culture," Gregory T. Swienton, remarks presented at the National Safety Council 2001 Congress and Expo, Atlanta, Georgia, September 24, 2001, p. 9.
[17] U.S. Department of Labor, "Statement of Labor Secretary Elaine L. Chao on Historic Lows in Workplace Injury and Illness," December 18, 2001.
[18] "Government Worker Injury and Illness Rates Rise in 2000," Professional Safety, American Society of Safety Engineers, July, 2001.

worker illnesses, injuries, and deaths by introducing comprehensive workplace safety training programs and protocols, a good model for the federal government to follow.

Federal Worker 2000 Initiative: Promoting a safer workplace?

In 1999, President Clinton issued a memorandum to the heads of Executive Branch departments and agencies establishing a new initiative, "Federal Worker 2000." In announcing the initiative, President Clinton said that he wanted "to make the safety and health of every Federal worker a central value in each operation performed in Federal workplaces" and "to ensure that when injuries do occur, Federal employees are given the best possible care and are returned to work as quickly as possible."[19]

Great Hopes . . .

The then-President expressed great expectations for the initiative, stating that he was "convinced that this new focus on safety and health in the federal government will result in fewer injured workers, significant cost reductions, and an enhanced ability to serve the American public."[20]

The Federal Worker 2000 presidential initiative included three main goals. The first goal was to reduce the Total Case Rate (TCR) for most federal agencies by 3 percent per year or 15 percent in five years. As a part of this goal, federal departments and agencies were expected to improve the timeliness of reporting of injuries and illness by 5 percent each year.

The second goal, which is concerned with that portion of injury/illness case experience considered to be the more serious, was to reduce the lost time case rate (LTCR), which measures the time the employee loses from work beyond the date or shift of injury, for those worksites with the highest federal lost time case rate by 10 percent per year over five years, for a total of 50 percent.

The third goal was to reduce the lost production day rate (LPDR), which is an expression of the number of days lost due to injuries and illnesses per 100 employees in the agency, by 2 percent per year. This third goal could be achieved by preventing injuries and illnesses, lessening the severity of the injuries, or by increasing return to work and light duty accommodation for those injured.[21]

Under the initiative, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Employment Standards Administration's Office of Workers Compensation Programs (OWCP), which administers FECA, were charged with tracking federal departments and agencies on an annual basis to measure their success in achieving these goals.

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[19] Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), U.S. Department of Labor, "Federal Worker 2000: A Presidential Initiative," July 2, 1999.
[20] Ibid.
[21] OSHA, "Goals of the Federal Worker 2000 Presidential Initiative," July 2, 1999.

Prior to the Federal Worker 2000 initiative, OWCP already had been devoting substantial effort to improving the timeliness of injury reporting by federal agencies, because they contended that prompt submission of an employee's Notice of Injury was critical in order for OWCP to be able to serve injured workers' needs, and especially to ensure timely processing of medical bills. If lost time from work or medical expenses are claimed or anticipated, federal agencies are required by regulation to submit the Notice of Injury within 10 working days (or 14 calendar days) of receiving it from an employee.

. . . Mixed Results

OWCP has begun posting quarterly reports of both the timely notice of work injury and lost production days, although there are no reports available yet on either the first or second goals of the Federal Worker 2000 initiative. While OWCP claims that "good progress has been made with respect to . . . timeliness," their most recent report shows that during the 2nd quarter of FY 2001, only just over half — 54.6 percent — of Notice of Injury forms were filed on a timely basis, lower than the rate of 56.1 percent for all of FY 2000 and the rate of 56.9 percent in the 1st quarter of FY 2001.[22] However, it should be acknowledged that FY 2000 had demonstrated substantial improvement over FY 1998, the baseline year, when the rate was 50.3 percent.

OWCP's most recent report on lost production days includes a mixed bag of results. The U.S. Postal Service's LPDR increased 23.1 percent, which is the primary reason that the overall federal government LPDR increased by 11.3 percent. If the USPS is excluded, the rest of the government's increase was only 1.4 percent.

A Key Council in Limbo

The Federal Advisory Council on Occupational Safety and Health (FACOSH) is a 16-person council which advises the Secretary of Labor and OSHA on issues concerning occupational safety and health of federal employees, encourages the establishment and maintenance of effective safety initiatives in every federal agency and department, and helps develop new policies in the federal sector. An active FACOSH could be providing critical input in helping to make the Federal Worker 2000 initiative succeed. Yet, FACOSH has not met since January of 2001 and new FACOSH members are yet to be appointed.

Workplace Safety Success Stories

Overall, the private sector has done better at improving their workplace safety record than has the federal government, providing some excellent examples of outstanding success. State and local government entities also provide some good benchmarks.

[22] Employment Standards Administration, Office of Workers' Compensation Programs, U.S. Department of Labor, "Federal Employee Safety and Injury Initiative," www.dol-esa.gov.

Private Sector Success Stories

Intel: The Green Cross for Safety

The National Safety Council (NSC), whose stated mission is to "educate and influence society to adopt safety, health, and environmental practices, and procedures that prevent and mitigate human suffering and economic losses arising from preventable causes," bestowed their 2001 Green Cross for Safety Award to the Intel Corporation and its president, Dr. Craig Barrett. In granting the award, the NSC cited Dr. Barrett's leadership in protecting "human life and health" among Intel's employees.[23]

At Intel, between 1996 and 2000, OSHA recordable injuries and illnesses decreased an average of 30 percent each year. Between 1998 and 2000, Intel's injury rate decreased 43 percent, and since 1994, the rate has decreased a remarkable 80 percent. The company achieved a performance level of .27 per 100 employees recordable injury/illness rate in 2000, down from 1.2 in 1996. Between 1996 and 2000, performance improvements have translated into the avoidance of more than 2,000 recordable injuries. The company's lost-day case rate (LDCR) in 1996 was 0.35 and fell to 0.08 in 2000, which represented a continuation of dramatic reductions, with a 20 percent improvement from 1999 to 2000. Intel's numbers in 1998 were 0.45 and 0.15 for recordable and LDCR, respectively. In comparison, the rates for all U.S. semiconductor manufacturers were 2.9 and 1.5, six and ten times higher, respectively.

This safety performance has not happened in a vacuum, however. Since 1994, Intel has placed the highest priority on managing an environmental health and safety policy throughout the organization that emphasizes that the goal is "a healthful and safe workplace, free of occupational injury and illness."[24] Intel emphasizes individual responsibility for safety by all employees and at all levels of management. The company expects employees to report potential safety hazards and issues, and to be involved in implementing solutions.

According to John Dyslin, editor of Safety and Health magazine, "Intel's leadership views the company's Environmental, Health and Safety (EHS) performance as a linchpin of its corporate fitness."[25] Craig Barrett, Intel's president and CEO, exemplifies that commitment by stressing that EHS performance is equally important to Intel as is economic success. In fact, Barrett believes that "you can't have one without the other."[26]

[23] "Corporate America's Safety Challenge," remarks by Alan C. McMillan, President, National Safety Council, at the 2001 Green Cross for Safety Medal dinner, New York, New York, June 25, 2001.
[24] 2000 Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Performance Report, Intel Corporation.
[25] Safety and Health, September, 2001.
[26] Ibid.

Ryder: "A Company-Wide Safety Culture"

Ryder and its president and CEO, Gregory T. Swienton, have been selected by the National Safety Council to receive its 2002 Green Cross for Safety Award. In announcing the award, NSC said that "Ryder has a superlative record of providing a company-wide safety culture."[27]

Between 1995 and 2000, Ryder's total incident case rate per hundred employees dropped from 8.67 to 6.37. During the same period, bodily injury physical damage claims per million miles driven decreased from 4.71 to 3.55. Also, workers' compensation expenses per employee decreased from $148 to $104.

Since joining Ryder in 1999, Swienton has identified safety as one of Ryder's top five goals and has attempted to ensure that safety is integrated into all aspects of the business process. Much like other private sector companies that have been successful in improving workplace safety, Ryder has a philosophy that considers no accident acceptable and all accidents preventable.

Swienton believes that safety risks can be managed more effectively with a step-by-step process. At Ryder, that process begins with first comparing the company's present performance with ideal performance and identifying areas for improvement. Then, the Ryder step-by-step process sets standards, measures progress, and finally evaluates the process against the standards that have been set. But, Swienton believes that the most important ingredient in success is to have the commitment, leadership and involvement of a company's top management, because "building a safety culture requires that safety become an internal value that underlies every activity from the shop floor to the executive suite."[28]

Swienton believes that developing safety excellence within the corporation requires a significant shift in corporate values and beliefs, such as no longer thinking that injuries are unavoidable to believing that all injuries can be prevented and from an understanding that major injuries are investigated to instead expecting that all incidents are eliminated.

H.J. Heinz Company: the Key Elements Safety Process

Between 1995 and 2000, Heinz improved its total incident rate (TIR)[29] performance by 65 percent. Over the same time period, Heinz also improved their lost workday case rate by 65 percent. Also, the total number of workers compensation claims and the total cost of claims submitted has been cut by 50 percent.[30]

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[27] "Ryder System, Inc. to Receive National Safety Council's *Green Cross for Safety Medal*," press release, September 24, 2001.
[28] "Building a Safety Culture," p. 7.
[29] Heinz defines Total Incident Rate as the number of injuries and illnesses related to a common exposure base of 100 full-time workers. Heinz believes that the common exposure base enables the company to make accurate comparisons between its manufacturing locations and other similar industries and to perform trend analysis over time.
[30] H.J. Heinz Company Fiscal Year 2000 Environmental, Health and Safety Report, p. 12.

Heinz manages safety through what they call the Key Elements Safety Process, a systematic approach to safety management that aids in focusing effort and resources toward preventing injuries and illnesses. The corporate safety policy includes core values, such as a commitment that safety is everyone's responsibility, that safety and health can be managed and that every injury or illness could and should have been prevented.[31]

The company builds upon the core values by providing what they refer to as "control tools," such as organizational planning and support, the development of standards and practices, training, and accountability and performance feedback. At each manufacturing location, Heinz employs an individual safety professional who participates in the Heinz Safety Qualification process to improve his/her knowledge of such things as safeguarding, regulatory compliance, industrial hygiene, behavioral safety and record keeping. The bottom line understanding in the Heinz safety model is that certain unsafe behaviors have consequences, such as recordable injuries and illness, a lost workday, or even a fatality.

Alcoa, Inc.: Strong Commitment, Remarkable Achievement

Alcoa has a relatively long record of achieving a safer workplace. Between 1990 and 2000, the company's total recordable injury frequency rate dropped from approximately 6.8 incidents per 200,000 hours worked to 2.9, a decrease of almost 60 percent. During the same time, Alcoa's lost workday injury frequency rate showed even more dramatic improvement, dropping from 1.1 incidents per 200,000 hours worked to 0.2, more than 80 percent.

Alcoa's commitment to workplace safety is spelled out in their corporate Environmental, Health and Safety (EHS) principles, which state that the company "values human life above all else and manages risks accordingly, relentlessly pursues an EHS incident-free workplace, and does not compromise EHS value for profit or production."[32]

Within the company, Alcoa pays tribute to the people who have demonstrated an exemplary commitment to EHS performance and to Alcoa's performance overall by sponsoring EHS Excellence Awards in two categories. EHS Performance Awards are earned by business units or locations that show outstanding EHS performance or improvement in performance. Selections are based on a review of performance data such as audit scores and injury rates. Alcoa also grants EHS Achievement Awards, which can be earned by business units, locations, teams or individuals. Alcoa measures EHS progress through comprehensive audits of each of its facilities and through quarterly reviews of each business unit.

[31] Ibid, p. 9.
[32] "EHS Value, Policy and Principles," Environment, Health and Safety, Alcoa Foundation, 2001, www.alcoa.com.

DuPont: Getting to Zero

For many years, DuPont has led much of private industry in committing to making its own workplace a safer and healthier environment for its employees. DuPont has also been an industry leader in sharing their experience with other companies, helping them to improve their workplace safety performance.

From 1994 to 2000, DuPont reduced recordable injuries by more than 65 percent and lost work injuries by more than 60 percent. Since 1991, for most years, DuPont's recordable injuries and illnesses per 200,000 hours worked has been approximately one-tenth that of the chemical industry average. It has been almost one-twentieth that of the entire manufacturing industry average.[33]

In 1999, almost 60 percent of DuPont plants did not experience a single recordable injury. In fact, many DuPont plants, including those with more than 2,000 employees, have operated for more than ten years without a recordable injury.[34]

DuPont believes that all injuries and occupational illnesses are preventable and has made it a company commitment to achieve a goal of zero injuries and illnesses. DuPont is also committed to making "consistent, measurable progress in implementing this commitment."[35]

DuPont has developed extensive systems and processes to eliminate "acute" injuries and illnesses such as those that might result from a fire, a fall, chemical exposure or from contact with moving equipment. DuPont works to identify the underlying causes of events that result in injury or illness, so they can be addressed through design changes or administrative controls.

DuPont's Chairman and CEO, Charles O. Holliday, believes that "improved safety can add millions of dollars to many companies' bottom lines — and millions of dollars more in shareholder value." Holliday estimates that in one recent year, 1997, if DuPont had experienced the same level of lost workday cases as what was the average for all U.S. industries, it would have cost the company as much as $332 million in lost profits.[36]

Holliday believes that DuPont's success is primarily due to making workplace safety a core value within the company. However, achieving that requires a "fundamental change in a company's overall safety culture and the way that safety is viewed by everyone within the organization, which requires the unconditional support and involvement of the corporate leadership."[37]

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[33] "2001 Global Progress Report," Safety, Health and Environment, DuPont, www.dupont.com.
[34] Holliday.
[35] "The DuPont Commitment," Safety, Health and Environment, DuPont, www.dupont.com.
[36] Holliday.
[37] Ibid.

In implementing their goal of zero injuries, DuPont has put in place an organized system of managing processes, operational discipline and training, and to ensure a continued focus on safety, the company includes the use of performance measurements and systematically documented and evaluated audits to predict future safety performance.

Norfolk Southern: Eleven Gold Medals for Safety

In 2000, Norfolk Southern was awarded its 11th consecutive Harriman Gold Medal award for employee safety. In 1987, Norfolk Southern's reportable injury ratio per 200,000 employee-hours was 6.06. In 2000, it had dropped to 1.25, a decrease of almost 80 percent.[38]

Norfolk Southern began focusing on improving its "safety culture" in 1987. What developed was a series of enhancements that brought a new focus on safety on a constant and daily basis, including establishment of a network of safety committees and a safety auditing system.

Norfolk Southern has demonstrated that every facet of the company is committed to understanding and embracing the following six-point safety action plan: all injuries can be prevented; all exposures can be safeguarded; the prevention of injuries and incidents is the responsibility of each employee; training is essential for good safety performance; safety is a condition of employment; and, finally, that safety is good business.

In fact, Norfolk Southern believes that putting safety first has enabled the company to achieve financial success. According to Chuck Wehrmeister, Norfolk Southern's assistant vice president, safety and environment, the company does not look at what safety costs, but instead looks at what needs to be done in order to be safe. Wehrmeister contends that when you have a safe workplace, people enjoy coming to work and are more productive. He argues that Norfolk Southern cares first and the positive impact on the bottom line is a benefit of that approach. In other words, safety really evolves into good business.[39]

Public Sector Success Stories

NASA's Johnson Space Center: A Safety Initiative Pays Off

In 1994, the Space Center experienced several incidents that were costly and had the potential for severe injury to personnel, which prompted the management to renew its safety efforts. Since launching the initiative, the Center has decreased its lost time mishap rate by 77 percent, which translates into a cost avoidance of $2.08 million, based on a national average of $29,000 per lost-time event. Plus, material losses have been reduced by 51 percent.[40]

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[38] Norfolk Southern 2000 annual report, 2001, www.nscorp.com.
[39] Ibid.
[40] DuPont Safety Resources, www.dupont.com.

Basically, the Space Center turned things around by emphasizing management safety training, top management commitment and employee involvement. The Center also enhanced its Mishap Investigation Process by instituting a standardized process that emphasizes root cause determination and corrective action follow-up. To emphasize top managers' commitment to safety, they formed a Center-wide executive safety committee that meets monthly. The top managers also became more involved in mishap investigations, physically visiting mishap sites within 24 hours of an occurrence and actively following up on corrective and preventive actions.

The Center has stressed the importance of getting all employees involved in safety. Employees provide input on the content and conduct of STEP (Safety Through Everyone's Participation) training. They have also established a safety action team, which resolves safety issues and solicits employee input on how to solve problems.

New York City Metropolitan Transit Authority Bridges and Tunnels: The Most Improved Agency

Bridges and Tunnels (B&T), a division of New York City's Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), was recognized in both 1997 and 1998 as the MTA agency showing the most safety improvement over the previous year. Between 1994 and 1998, B&T reduced its lost-time and restricted-duty injury rate per 200,000 work hours from 22.00 to 6.01, close to a 75 percent reduction.

Safety training has been held for employees at all levels and employee safety committees operate at all facilities. Labor/management safety meetings are held quarterly and, as part of their overall performance evaluation annually, managers are evaluated on how well they promote safety among their employees.[41]

U.S. Department of the Treasury: A New Initiative

Last year, Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill announced that he is committed to reducing workplace injuries and has instituted a real-time safety data system to monitor lost workday incidents. The system requires that all injuries be reported within 24 hours along with information about how to prevent similar incidents.[42] Judgment is still out on whether this initiative will have the desired impact.

Recipe for Safety

Obvious common strains run through the most successful efforts. First, and foremost, the corporate leadership provides an organizational commitment to workplace safety that instills safety as part of the corporate culture. Second, a system is established in the organization that ensures that adequate record-keeping is provided, which allows the leadership and the entire corporate structure to understand whether programs are working, what is succeeding and what is not. Finally, there are incentives provided to do

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[41] Ibid.
[42] "O'Neill Vows to Work with Treasury Employees," Federal EEO Advisor, March 29, 2001.

better; i.e., improving workplace safety is a factor that impacts on whether you are an employee considered to be meeting the organization's performance expectations.

Change is Needed: Making "Safety" a Priority

In the private sector, a company can't lose money year after year without eventually going out of business, while the "business" of government, of course, is not aimed at turning a profit or making stockholders happy. Ironically, the profit motive may actually be the most important reason that much of private industry is light years ahead of the federal government in providing a safer, healthier workplace.

Private sector companies that have been the most successful in achieving a safer workplace were the ones that first recognized that improving safety would improve their bottom line. The safest companies may also have been motivated by a social commitment to their employees, i.e., a sincere concern for their employees' health and well-being. However, learning that elimination of workplace injuries and illnesses could save a great deal of money certainly helped companies move forward with a strategy to create a safer workplace and increase profits.

The federal government of course is not trying to make money. In fact, federal budgetary processes often give no compelling incentive in the federal government to save money either. Agency administrators tend to fear that if they have any money left over at the end of the fiscal year (if they save), a surplus will be considered evidence that they were allocated too much in the first place. The result may well be that their budgets would be cut for the next fiscal year.

However, there are other ways that an incentive to accomplish a safer workplace could be provided for federal government administrators and executives. For instance, there is now no fiscal accountability for each agency when it comes to compensation costs for workplace injuries and illnesses. In fact, worker compensation costs are simply added on to the next year's budget request. One way of providing an incentive would be to set actual targets for agencies' compensation costs. If an agency exceeded its targets, it would pay a financial price, such as no promotions or salary increases that year.

In the cases discussed above, corporate leaders recognized the economic value of safety, then devised strategies and put programs and systems in place. In the federal government, on the other hand, most safety programs that have been initiated have been allowed to languish. Many appear to be more window dressing than a bonafide campaign to achieve a safer workplace throughout the federal government. For instance, despite much fanfare when the Federal Worker 2000 initiative was announced in 1999, nearly three years later, there is very little, if any, evidence that a real commitment to workplace safety in the federal government exists, much less that any real progress has been made toward accomplishing a safer federal workplace.

Private sector companies have also demonstrated that safety performance can be turned around surprisingly fast. In the most successful cases, the company CEO himself has taken on the role of de facto “chief safety czar” for the company or has at least been actively engaged in the issue. However, in the federal government, despite the involvement of various branches of OSHA, particularly OFAP and OWCP, most of the separate agencies don’t have a single individual given the responsibility and power to implement a workplace safety plan.

While successful private sector initiatives inculcate safety as part of the corporate culture, too many federal agencies do not. Government’s attitude toward workplace safety is best exemplified by the fact that FACOSH, the advisory committee that is supposed to encourage the establishment and maintenance of effective safety initiatives in every federal agency and department, has not met for more than a year.

Successful private sector initiatives also make safety the responsibility of every employee at all levels of the corporate structure. They don’t just appoint a safety committee and instruct them to “go off and quietly do their safety thing, but don’t get in the way.” If one were to ask most federal department or agency heads what was going on with workplace safety in their agency, most would probably not be able to address the issue. The only exceptions might be policies or measures their agency has recently implemented to safeguard against anthrax or other safety measures to prevent a terrorism-related threat.

The most successful private sector initiatives set definite goals and measure the progress in reaching those goals. Although one facet of the federal government’s Federal Worker 2000 initiative was to do a better job of keeping track of how agencies are doing, only minimal progress has been made. In fact, most of the monitoring is directed at keeping track of the timeliness of reporting, and even at that, the progress is minimal at best.

Again, in the federal government, there appears to be neither a consequence for failure, nor any real incentive to succeed. For instance, CAGW recently reported on the performance bonuses received in the federal government. Federal agencies annually hand out millions of dollars in executive bonuses. Making progress in workplace safety is certainly not used as a performance standard. For example, the year after the USPS’s workplace safety record declined dramatically rather than improving, the USPS nonetheless handed out executive bonuses of $164.1 million. Between 1996 and 2000, the USPS gave out more than $1.4 billion in bonuses.

Improving workplace safety should be used to measure whether department and agency executives qualify for a bonus. No agency entity that has a deteriorating safety record should be granting bonuses to any of their executives, unless they can at least demonstrate that workplace safety has improved in their department or branch.

Conclusion

The following characteristics separate a successful workplace safety program from one that is likely to fail:

1. Committed Leadership. The leadership of the organization, whether private industry or in the federal government, must be committed to accomplishing a safer workplace. Workplace safety must be given the highest priority within the organization, and provided both adequate resources and moral support. Most importantly, whoever is in charge of the organization needs to make sure that everyone in that organization understands that workplace safety is a priority.

2. Organizational Buy-In. The organization's leadership must insist that the goal of a safer workplace is considered to be the responsibility of every employee, rather than just a safety committee. The leadership needs to instill an across-the-board belief in the organization that workplace injuries and illnesses are avoidable and that they can be eliminated. The idea of safety must become ingrained in the organization so that the organization develops a "culture" of safety.

3. Strategic Plan. The organization must develop a strategic plan with realistic, achievable goals, set targets and timelines, develop measurable performance standards, and then follow-up by analyzing what is or is not working and make corrections or other necessary changes to the plan.

4. Incentives. Financial incentives to succeed must be provided by linking performance in the area of workplace safety with promotions, raises and/or bonuses.

By learning from those in private industry who have succeeded and tapping their expertise, and then following the above-mentioned procedures, federal agencies could do a much better job of protecting government workers from death, illnesses, and injuries and providing safer workplaces for all employees.

A Time for Action

The administration has an opportunity to focus anew on workplace safety in the federal government. It can demonstrate a rededication to the goals of the Federal Worker 2000 initiative or replace it with a program that will work better. The administration needs to fill vacancies on the FACOSH and enable it to be an effective voice within the federal government for promoting a commitment to workplace safety. The FACOSH should be encouraged, in its advisory capacity, to help all agencies and departments develop meaningful workplace safety plans.

The administration must be willing to commit the financial resources necessary to ensure that these programs succeed. One individual needs to be designated as the person in the administration that is responsible for making sure that every agency and department implements a workplace safety plan. This "safety czar" must be provided with the authority to measure each agency and department's progress and make recommendations on how each program can be corrected and improved. In order for this effort to succeed, a system of financial incentives, either penalties or rewards, must somehow be incorporated into the strategic plan.

Congress must also recognize that committing the necessary resources to further workplace safety is an investment that will pay off in the long run, not only in making life better for federal employees, but also in budgetary savings. The appropriate congressional committees in the House and the Senate should hold oversight hearings to explore whether the federal government is doing all it can to accomplish a safer workplace. In addition to hearing from government witnesses, they need to solicit testimony from representatives of private sector companies that have already demonstrated that workplace safety can be improved.

At a time when it has become obvious that the huge federal budget surplus no longer exists and that the effort to fight terrorism is putting a further strain on those resources, federal officials should step up to the plate and wisely invest available resources toward achieving safer workplaces. The bottom line is that by doing so, the federal government can get twice the “bang” for the buck: accomplish a safer federal workplace and put the savings toward winning the war on terrorism.

CHART 1

Occupational Injury and Illness Rates of U.S. Federal Government Agencies Compared to Select Private Industries (1998)

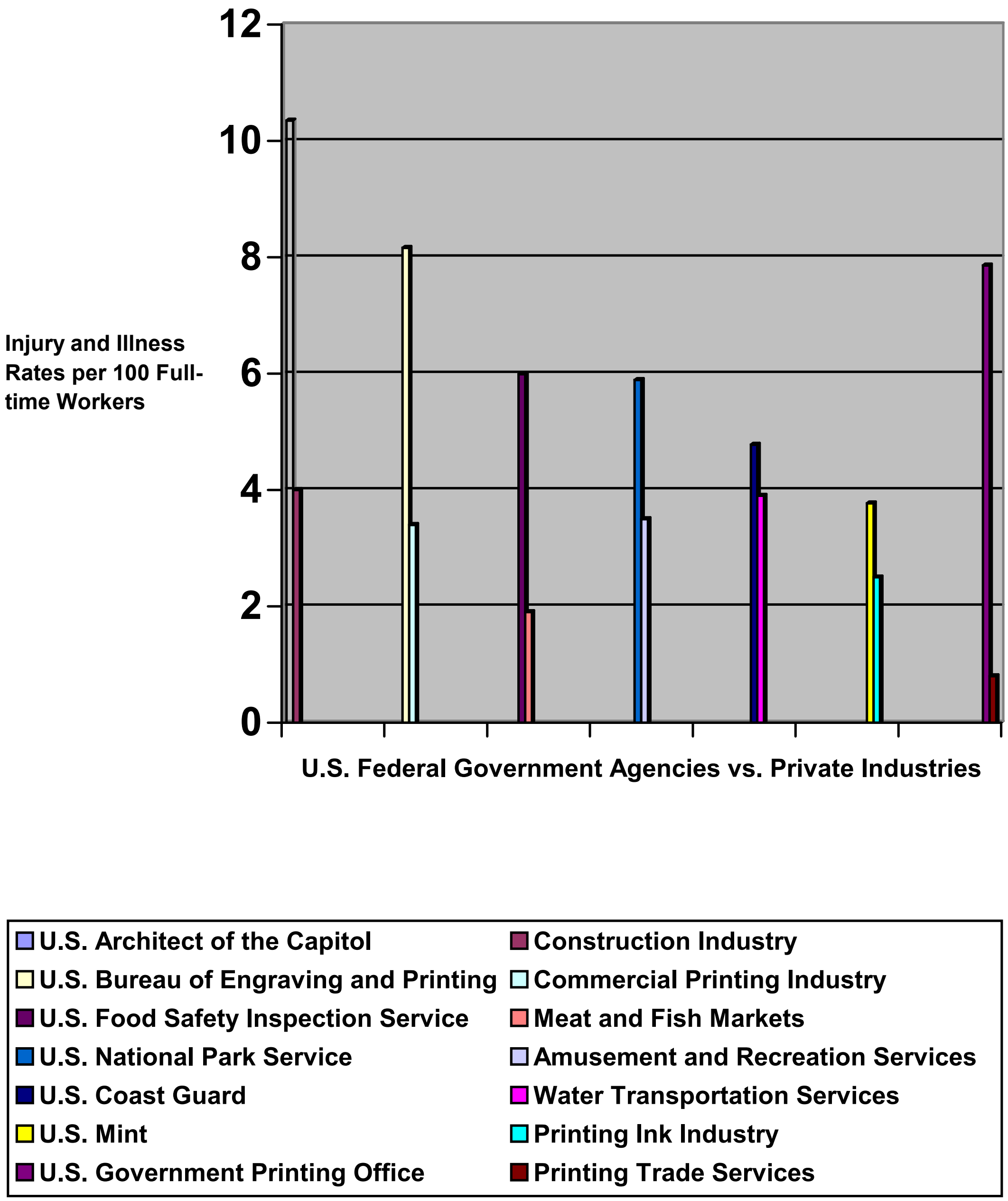

CHART 2

Occupational Injury and Illness Rates of U.S. Federal Government Agencies Compared to Select Private Industries (1999)

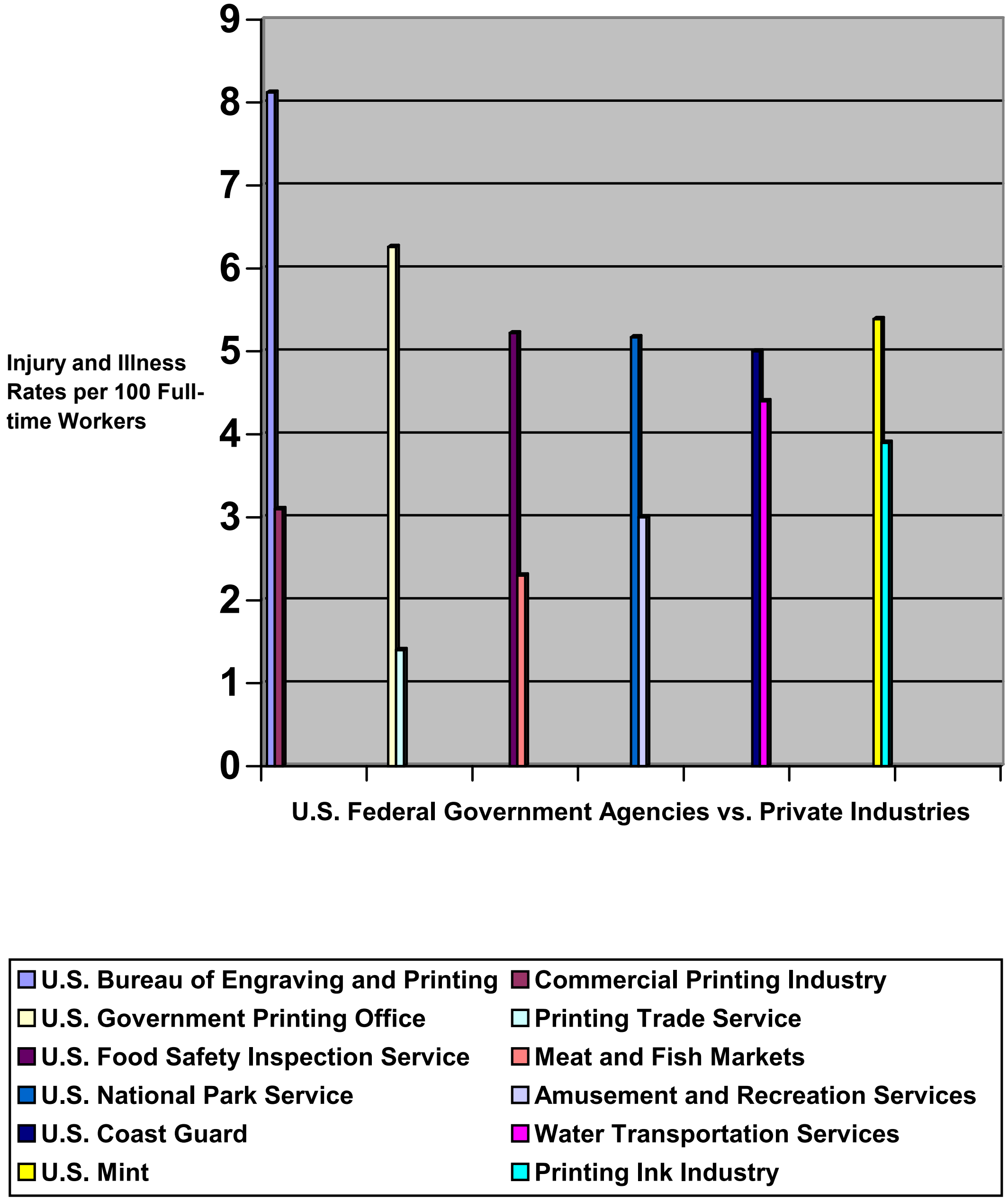

CHART 3

Occupational Injury and Illness Rates of U.S. Federal Government Agencies Compared to Select Private Industries (2000)

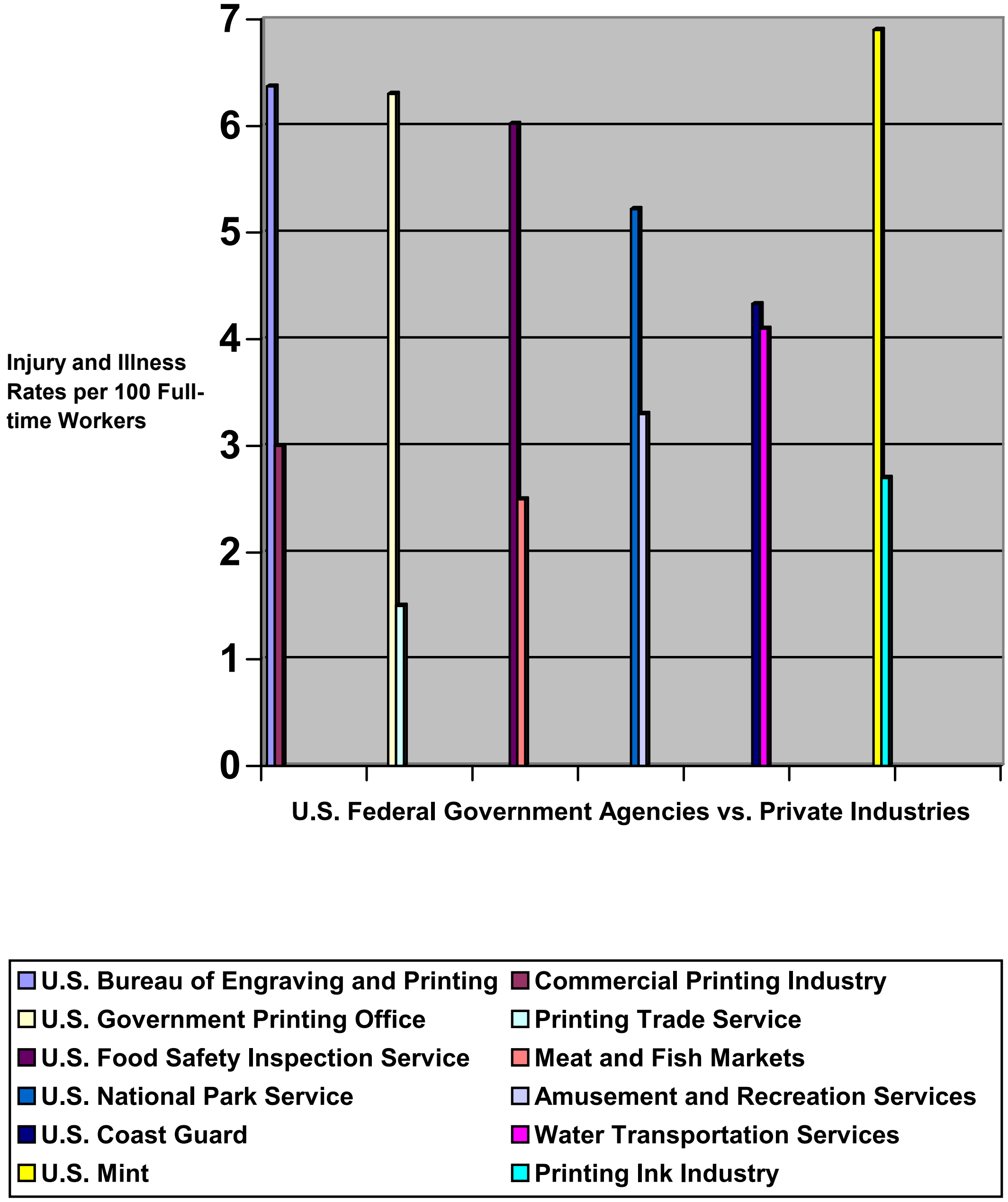

CHART 4

Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA) Payments

July 1, 1999 through June 30, 2000